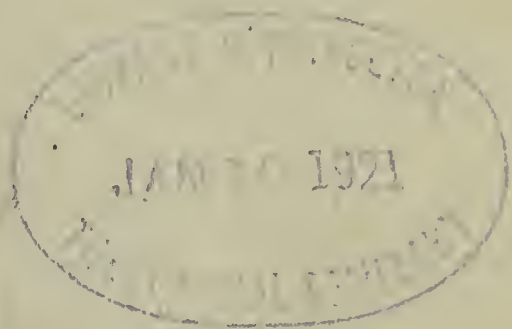


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XXI.

Dogma and Criticism.



BY

THE MOST REVEREND AND RIGHT HONOURABLE

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Dogma and criticism

DOGMA AND CRITICISM.

I have taken a well-worn theme as the subject of the lecture which I have the honour of giving in this place, and if I have nothing new to add to the literature which has grown up around it, it may nevertheless be of service that we should recall and reconsider the problems which are suggested by the twofold claim of the Church of England that she is a guardian of the primitive Christian faith, and that she welcomes at the same time all candid enquiry into the authenticity of her title deeds and the permanent value of her message to the world. The problems which emerge are grave and difficult. There is no problem for a Church which refuses to acknowledge the right of free investigation on the part of her members. Nor is there any problem for a Christian body which avowedly is bound by no tradition of the past, which takes as its *only* guiding principle the fine maxim that we must pursue truth wherever

we see it. But to combine freedom of thought with a recognition of the completeness and the unique character of the Christian faith is no easy task, and many of our fellow Christians believe it to be a task impossible to achieve.

Why is it that Christian dogma has made claim to finality? The axioms of science are not put forward by scientific men as final expressions of truth. They are guiding principles in accordance with which science carries on its investigations of natural law, but no one supposes that they are incapable of revision. We have heard something in recent years of the need for a restatement of what have been regarded for many centuries as the fundamental laws of space. But now it appears that they may not be so fundamental as was supposed. They were very useful as guides to enquiry, but perhaps the time has come to discard them, and to formulate a new set of axioms for our guidance in the future. As the philosophers have it, our scientific dogmas are only *regulative*, not *constitutive*, principles of nature. Science will be in no way disconcerted if they have to be restated. There is no ground for claiming finality for them. What, then, is the

reason that such a claim is made for religious or theological dogmas ?

You will anticipate the answer. It is because religious dogma claims to rest upon a direct revelation from God to man. And our conception of the degree of finality which may be claimed for theological propositions depends ultimately upon the meaning which we attach to this word, *revelation*. If God has, indeed, at a special moment or at special moments in the history of the world, directly and immediately revealed or unveiled to men something of His secrets and His eternal purpose, then such revelation has an authority quite different in kind from any of the axioms of science which have been painfully and gradually formulated, in accordance with the growth of human knowledge. It is true that this view of revelation has been challenged in our own time, the thought of which has been dominated in an undue degree by the concept of evolution. And it is asked, Is not revelation rather a gradual disclosure than a sudden unveiling ? And may it not be that what men have taken for an act of God should more accurately be described as an acquisition of knowledge on man's part which came to

him, as all natural knowledge has come, by the gradual quickening of his spiritual faculty in response to the discipline of life? If this be all that "revelation" means, there is no special sacredness or finality in what we think it has told us. I do not now propose to discuss at length this great question.* It is preliminary indeed to the topic which is in our thoughts to-day, for if the distinction between natural and revealed truth has no sure guarantee, there can be no ground for claiming any special permanence for the dogmas of theology, which might not equally be claimed for the principles of natural science. But one must start somewhere in an investigation of this kind, and I start from the presuppositions that revelation is an objective fact and that the Eternal GOD did reveal Himself in Christ in a fashion different in kind from any disclosure of His character which has been made in the progressive education of mankind. If we could reduce to a precise formula this revelation of God in Christ, we should be in possession of dogma unassailable by criticism, and beyond man's capacity to

*I have dealt with it in the article *Revelation* in *Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*.

disprove. So much is recognised by Christians of every school of thought, and in every part of the Universal Church of Christ.

Granted, however, that a revelation has been given, it does not follow that we can express it in precise terms. We can formulate our own discoveries, and mark the progressive stages in our knowledge of any science by a series of definite propositions. But we may be quite unequal to the task of setting out in words, which shall be true for all time, a message proceeding directly from the Eternal God. It is precisely here that we perceive the distinction between mysticism and rationalism in religion. The mystic will always refuse to formulate the ineffable mysteries, as he deems them, of the soul's intercourse with God: the rationalist (and in this sense there are rationalists in every branch of the Christian Church) is not content until he has attempted to express them in the language of the schools.

It is perhaps true (even Newman thought it to be true) that freedom from creeds and articles is the ideal condition of the religious life. That the soul shall be inflamed by a Divine fire, and illuminated by a Divine light,

it is not needful that there should be any conscious understanding of the mode and manner of the movements of the Divine Life. The saints have not always been theologians. The life of faith and hope and love can be lived without much thought of creeds. And it is a happy thing that it should be so.

But, none the less, if a revelation is to be made public, and the message which has been received is to be transmitted to succeeding generations—if, in short, its benediction is not to be confined to its original recipient—it is inevitable that it should be expressed in words and placed on record. Indeed, an intellectual necessity compels even the original recipient to formulate it in some fashion, however indefinitely, for his own comfort and future edification. And so it has come to pass that all or nearly all of the great religions which are based on revelations believed to have been vouchsafed to their founders possess sacred books in which an attempt has been made to express in speech, which others can understand, the substance of what has been revealed.

I do not stay to speak of the blessings which have come to mankind through the sacred books

of Judaism and of Christianity, nor is it necessary now to enquire into the precise degree of Divine illumination which was granted to their several writers. We have to mark only that the record of a revelation is a different thing from the revelation itself. The revelation being from God must be true and infallibly true. But the long history of Biblical criticism has taught us that to apply the epithet *infallible* to the record of the revelation, the record which has been set down by fallible men, Divinely assisted we do not doubt, but not miraculously guarded from error at every point, is not completely justified by the facts so far as we have been able to collect them. It is a commonplace of modern theology that inspiration does not guarantee infallible perfection of statement. We do not count it disrespectful or irreverent to collate the various reports in the Gospels of our Lord's sacred words, in the endeavour to determine exactly what it was that He said. If we can reach an exact report, we may be sure (so all of us will say who recognise in Him the supreme revelation of truth) that we have a saying of permanent value for all mankind, although we may differ as to its meaning and

[application in the changing conditions of our modern life. But what I am now concerned with is the principle that spiritual truths, from their very nature, cannot be expressed in terms of scientific precision without the risk of losing a measure of their power. If we gain by definition, we may also lose, unless we are careful to bear in mind that the revelation is a greater thing than the record of it. We must not circumscribe the revelation of Divine Love by the words in which we endeavour to express its benediction, while we may humbly and thankfully confess that we can find no better words than the sacred words of the New Testament which are the foundation of all Christian theology. It is upon such a sentence as "the Word became flesh" that the Church has built up her whole system of belief. We may think, as most Christians have thought in the past, that this statement, dealing with the deepest mysteries of God and man, and of God in man, may be taken as theologically exact for all time. Or some may prefer to say that it is the exact expression of the thought of the greatest of Christian mystics as to the revealed truth of the Incarnation. There is a difference, and a wide

difference, between these two ways of viewing St. John's words. But, in any case, they form, with other like words, the *depositum fidei* which the Christian Church is commissioned to guard. We do not speak of them as exhausting the content of a revelation which is beyond our powers fully to understand, but we rest upon them, and are thankful to do so.

We come now to the inferences which the Church has derived from the original charters of her heritage. Very early, the Church began to formulate Creeds, to put into a series of propositions what she conceived to be the fundamental matters of the Christian revelation. We are here in view of a process which we understand. No question arises as to the "inspiration" of the Creeds. We know much about the controversies which called into being successive forms of Creed, and Christian history teaches us to appreciate the sagacity with which they were fashioned, and the care which was taken to base each clause upon Scriptural warrant. Those who drew up the Creeds always insisted on the authority of the original *depositum fidei*, the words of Scripture, however plausible and inevitable might seem this or that

departure from the *litera scripta* of the Old and New Covenants. Certainly, the interpretations of Scripture which commended themselves to the theologians of the early centuries do not always commend themselves to us. The exegesis of Athanasius himself would not satisfy modern scholarship, in some instances. The reasoning which convinced some of the Fathers at the General Councils would not, perhaps, convince us. So much we must recognise. And, further, the form which the Creeds took was necessarily shaped, to some extent, by the temper and the circumstances and the intellectual conditions of the ages which produced them. Theological arguments cannot escape from the logical and scientific categories in which we must arrange our thoughts ; but these scientific categories vary according to the measure of our knowledge. To claim final and absolute and complete truth for any theological formula devised by man is to make a claim which neither philosophy nor history will allow us to maintain. That is not to say that the Creeds may be lightly described as mere formulæ of the past, which have no special title to the allegiance of those who have inherited them. But it is to

say that they are not *absolute*, and for ever incapable of restatement or reinterpretation.

It has been argued, indeed—and the argument is weighty and serious—that the guidance of the Spirit in the Church so over-ruled the deliberations of the Church, when undivided, that the decisions of the great Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries must be taken as irrevocable and unchangeable in form by any body of less authority than a General Council of all Christendom. That is a position which was accepted by many of the best and most learned of our Anglican theologians in the last century, and it is accepted by many still. It is attractive, for it seems to offer what all thinking men desire, an infallible expression of final truth. Now are we entitled to make such a claim for the Creeds? That is the real point at issue among us.

First, then, mark that the Fathers of the fifth century had no idea of this kind in their minds when they set themselves to revise the Creeds of Nicaea or of Constantinople. They produced new formulae at Ephesus and Chalcedon, which they deemed better—and which probably we deem to be better—than

any that had commanded authority before. And we must mark, too, that their decisions were not the unanimous decisions of Christendom. We may, and do, acquiesce in the grave judgments that were passed at Ephesus and Chalcedon upon the Nestorians and Monophysites, although many of us would hesitate to add *Anathema sit* to these judgments upon theological error, in regard to topics which are hardly within our powers perfectly to understand. But we would not, or some of us would not, be prepared to say that Nestorians and Monophysites are not Christians, that they have no share in the Spirit of Christ or that their sacraments are endued with no measure of grace. The decisions of the great Councils were not the decisions of a wholly unanimous Christendom. That they were (as it seems to us) right decisions, decisions over-ruled for good by the Providence of God, decisions which none of us wishes to reverse, is quite true. But when men speak of the voice of undivided Christendom, they forget sometimes that the Church was divided—in the sense that Christians broke communion with each other—long before the Reformation, long before the great schism

between East and West—long before the formulating of the Athanasian Creed, even before the formulating of the Nicene Creed as we recite it now. And the more the history of the early Councils is studied, with their factions, their violences, their methods of conducting debate, the less does it seem possible to claim for their decisions an infallibility of phrase which goes beyond even what we claim for the holy words of the apostles and evangelists themselves.

We cannot impress upon ourselves with too great emphasis wherein the true value of the Creeds consists. It is not, if I may hope to have carried you with me so far, in their infallibility of statement and absolute perfection of phrase. It consists in the protection which they offer to the original deposit of revealed truth. The value of the Athanasian Creed, for example, lies in the repudiation of this and that form of inference which would be inconsistent with the truth that the original *depositum fidei* enshrines. But it is not disloyal to that sacred truth to say that if we were now re-writing the Athanasian Creed we should change some phrases.

Few, however, will be so bold as to suggest that the Church of England should set itself now to the task of re-writing the Creeds. Certainly, I do not suggest it. Among all the diversities of Christian opinion, they—or at any rate the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed—provide that expression of our common faith upon which all Christians are most nearly agreed. They are chanted in Rome and in Moscow as in Canterbury. They are accepted by vast numbers in non-episcopal Christian Churches which yet hold themselves aloof from the historic Churches of Christendom. They shew a basis for unity. But it is not at all certain that they will provide such a basis, or help us in the great task of reconciliation which faces the whole company of Christian people dispersed throughout the world, if we begin by making a claim for them of infallibility and permanence, which even those who drew them up would have been slow to make. They are precious historic records of the One Faith. That is enough.

If we view the Creeds in this light, we shall be careful of meddling with them. But we shall also be careful not to press the acceptance

upon everyone, on pain of anathema, of every clause in the exact sense in which it was originally intended. Theology is a science; while revelation is a gift of God. And theology must change its form with every increase in the Church's wisdom. To attempt to restrict the Church's intellectual life by the categories and conditions of long past ages, may divorce from the Church's allegiance many whose allegiance is best worth having. To this we shall return presently. But it is sufficient at this point to affirm the authority of the Church, and of every branch thereof, to determine the conditions under which men are admitted to full membership, and to allow such a measure of freedom in interpreting the clauses of the Creed as may seem from time to time consistent with allegiance to the revelation on which the Creeds are based, and from which they derive their vitality and power.

I do not, then, speak of infallible and inerrant formulae of the faith. But it is no part of my intention to suggest therefore that the articles of the Apostles' Creed, or any of them, should be described as untrue. The most startling of all to a mind trained in modern

science is probably that form of the Apostles' Creed which speaks of a Resurrection of the Flesh, rather than a Resurrection of the Body. Many of our forefathers probably would not have found much difference between the two forms. Whether men said "I believe in the Resurrection of the Flesh" or "I believe in the Resurrection of the Body," they meant generally to express their belief that the material elements of our mortal bodies of flesh would be revived and reanimated after death in a new and glorious fashion. And that is a belief which very few educated people entertain now. No doubt it is no new discovery that this is a difficult conception. Such a materialist doctrine of the future life was repudiated by some of the Fathers—Gregory of Nyssa will serve as an instance—who were not conscious of any inconsistency when they recited the Creed. And even the phrase "resurrection of the flesh" has had defenders in our own time, as susceptible of a meaning which an honest man may use. I do not doubt that we all find ways of reconciling its use with our scientific conscience. But I think we ought to have courage to say plainly that we do not like it, if we do not like it. The

men who devised this phrase meant by it something which we do not mean ; and we of the clergy do not help the cause of the Church by concealing this from those whom we have to teach. I will not say that the phrase is inexplicable, for I know how it has been explained or explained away by subtle and learned men ; but I am sure that it is unfortunate that we should retain it in our baptismal offices, where it is understood by many simple hearers in its crudest and most literal sense. Here is a variant reading in the Creed. Why should we not enjoy the same liberty in selecting the reading which we believe to be nearest the truth, that we exercise when we apply the test of congruity in judging between two variant readings in the Gospels?

This is an extreme case—the most difficult case. I will mention another clause which presents no particular difficulty to us, but which again is only free from difficulty because we recite it in a sense different from that which it originally bore. We say that our Lord “descended into hell,” meaning Hades, the place of departed souls. And we explain it as meaning that His death was truly human, and that He

shared the experience of man whose nature He assumed after death as He had in life. Quite true, indeed, so far as we know. But that is exactly what the clause did not mean to those who inserted it in the Creed. The doctrine of the Descent into Hades in the early centuries was always associated with a belief of a special and unique mission of Christ to the dead imprisoned in the unseen world, a belief which was curiously combined with the folklore of baptismal rites.* And when the belief in Christ's Descent into Hades was affirmed, it was not the *likeness* of His after death experience to ours that was presupposed, but its *unlikeness*. His mission to the world of the unseen issued in a deliverance of captive souls, in the Harrowing of Hell and the overthrow of Satan and his powers. The prominence which this belief had in the Middle Ages was very remarkable ; and it is only an afterthought of more sober exegesis which recommends and enables us now to interpret the clause " He descended into Hell " after the edifying fashion in which we explain it to candidates for Confirmation. Again, it is not untrue—so far as we know—and there are

*I have treated of this at length in my *Studia Sacra*, chap. i.

some Scriptural phrases behind it. But we have only to ask ourselves whether we should now put it into the Creed among the fundamental articles of a Christian's profession, to be assured that it does not represent to us all that it represented in the early centuries. Criticism here has made havoc of the dogma originally implied, while it has happily enabled us to substitute for it another more congruous to our modern way of looking at death.

However, it is not necessary to press this too far, as there is no special difficulty in accepting this article of the Creed. Everyone understands that to speak of Christ as "descending" into Hades or of "ascending" into Heaven, is to use language which was affected by the primitive conception of this solid earth as the centre of the material universe, the place of gloom and darkness being "beneath," while the place of joy and blessedness was "above." The language of devotion still bears witness to this view. *Sursum corda* is the form which an exhortation to fix our thoughts on the realities of the spiritual world naturally takes.* We

* I have borrowed a sentence or two from my article *Ascension* in Hasting's *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, to which I must refer for a fuller treatment of the subject.

speaking of noble ideals as "high" or "lofty," and of material ambitions as "low," and the abode of the Eternal is described "as a high and holy place," although we know that it is not limited by any conditions of space. There is no doubt as to the definiteness with which the Gospel writers speak of the Ascension of Christ as a fact in time, a withdrawal from earthly eyes of which those who witnessed it were convinced. The cloud which veiled Him from their sight may have been a real cloud: why not? But we know, too, that this Ascension in bodily form is represented as the Ascension of a *spiritual* Body, to use St. Paul's great phrase. And of the movements—if that is the right word—of such a Body, not subject to the laws of space and time, we can form no image. A physical theory of the Ascension of Christ is out of our reach. But criticism has not dissolved the dogma or discredited the event behind the words "He ascended into heaven," although we are not so sure that we could draw a picture of it as the mediaeval painters were.

So much is recognised by most of us. But there is a sharp difference of opinion as to how far it is legitimate to interpret some other

clauses of the Creed in a manner which is different from the intention of those who placed them there. I would deprecate in the first place the use of such terms as "honest" or "dishonest" as descriptive of interpretations which do or do not commend themselves to us, when we review the clauses: "Rose again the third day" or "Born of the Virgin Mary." We do not help our own faith, or the faith of others, by language which recalls the *Anathemata* of the early centuries. Criticism has its lawful place in the examination of these clauses, as of all the clauses in the Creeds. The Creeds were made for Christians; Christians were not made for the Creeds. But it does not follow at all that these clauses may not emerge from the strictest criticism and most candid scrutiny as historical statements of events in time. And the fundamental character of such clauses is sometimes overlooked. What are we to say about them?

First, then, criticism is not to be forbidden its proper function in an examination of these great matters. Nothing, indeed, that can be said by authority will prevent critical scholarship from the analysis of the evidence which is

forthcoming for the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord from the dead and for His Birth from a Virgin Mother. It is quite certain that the Gospels no less than the Creeds assert these things as historical facts, as events in time, although much more than merely historical facts in that they are charged with momentous spiritual consequences. The article "Born of the Virgin Mary," for instance, is the assertion of a fact. Its meaning is unmistakeable. It means that our Lord had no earthly father. It has never been taken to mean anything else. True or false, this is what it means. It is not a statement, like the statement of the Lord's ascension into heaven, which has to do with the spiritual and glorified Body of Christ, the character and qualities of which we cannot pretend to understand. Nor does it include a term like "heaven," which introduces us to a region which has never been delimited, and which may mean a condition of the spirit rather than a part of space. Such a statement as "He ascended into heaven" is not a statement of a natural movement or process which we can examine or define. But when we say that Christ was born of a Virgin Mother, we are not using the language of

symbol or of poetry. And in like manner when we say that Christ "rose again the third day from the dead" we are asserting that on the third day after Christ's death a historical event took place. We cannot get away from these articles of the Creed, as expressive of facts, and facts are the legitimate province of the critical historian.

We have had experience in our own Church and in our own time of the unwisdom of attempting to foreclose enquiry by authority and we have learnt how hazardous is that form of argument which the logicians call a *dilemma*. I will recall two instances out of many.

Sixty years ago the questions which engaged the attention of English theologians more than any other were, I suppose, questions as to the Inspiration of Holy Scripture. For generations it had been generally believed that an inspired book must be an inerrant, an infallible book. Inspiration was held to be inconsistent with any trace of human infirmity in the record. It was counted irreverent, if not blasphemous, to suggest that this heavenly treasure was contained in earthen vessels. The sacred volume of the Bible was verbally inspired by God Him-

self from beginning to end : to speak of it as witnessing to the growth of moral ideas, to the process of the spiritual education of mankind, the lower revelation leading up to the greater, was believed by very many good people, and by some really learned people, to be destructive of the authority of the Bible in any true sense. Either it is infallible, inerrant in every sentence of every book—whether the book be history or prophecy or psalm or gospel—or its authority has departed. It can no longer be a guide to life. I was taught this as a boy ; I daresay that others here were taught in the same way. But the dilemma was not just. It was not true that we had to choose between these two alternatives, although they seemed to many to be the only alternatives. A larger and less restricted view of the meaning of inspiration has taught those who read the Bible to value it quite as much as their fathers did. There never was a time throughout the Christian ages when the Bible was more industriously studied than it is at this moment. And if we are to measure its influence by its circulation, the magnitude of the enterprise of the Bible Society—greater than in any past generation—shews that its bene-

diction has not been limited by the gradual disappearance of the dogma of verbal inspiration. We may think differently from our fathers as to the process by which the books of Holy Scripture came into being, but we do not think less reverently of their message or less thankfully of them as a guide to life. The dilemma "All or nothing" was wrong.

Take another instance. One of the principal motives behind the splendid enthusiasm of the foreign missionary societies of the Church in former generations, was the eager and Christian desire to save from the flames of a material hell those who did not know the name of Him whom we know to be the Saviour of the world. It is not too much to say that in every part of the Church Catholic, the missionary was accustomed at one time to commend his message thus : Eternal torture awaits you if you do not accept the claim of Christ, and profess allegiance to Him. Good men speak now with less assurance as to the final destiny of the soul. The tremendous doctrine of ultimate reward and retribution is, indeed, still a doctrine of Christianity ; it has an ethical basis ; it has its roots in the New Testament ; it has words of

Christ behind it, which we dare not set aside. But we do not speak so glibly or so confidently of hell as our forefathers did, nor does the Christian missionary (at any rate of our communion) appeal to its awful sanctions so habitually in his preaching. The emotion of fear is not stimulated by the Christian preacher at all as much as it used to be. We rest rather on the Love of God, and on the power of Christ to redeem from sin. But missionary enthusiasm has not been weakened on that account. The missionary appeal is, we may thankfully claim, more urgent, more insistent, more widely supported than it has ever been before. Few changes in the manner of presenting the Christian message have been brought about more silently or swiftly than has been the change during our own lifetime in the degree of emphasis which is laid on the motives of love and of fear. But the change has not produced the ill effects which prophets of gloom predicted for it ; and we have here an illustration of the unwisdom of circumscribing the power of the Gospel message by resting it too exclusively on this dogma or on that. Our message, as we believe, is a message of power, in whatever form it has

been presented, provided that it does not explicitly repudiate any part of the revelation which was given in Christ.

It is this against which we have to guard as we examine ever more closely the records of that revelation. And when we examine the records of the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, and the dilemma which St. Paul solemnly puts before us, that either Christ is risen or our preaching is vain, we shall be slow to say that he was not justified here. Dilemmas are dangerous, but this is presented to us on authority which we cannot disregard. If this were a dogma which criticism had dissolved, or were likely to dissolve, we should be in a situation very much more serious than any which the Church has had to face hitherto. And, lest I should be misunderstood, I desire to say that, speaking for myself, I believe that the evidence for the objective and historical fact of our Lord's Resurrection is not only sufficient but that in some respects it makes a stronger appeal than it did before it had been subjected to the laborious analysis of modern critics. One cannot speak quite so emphatically as to the external evidence for the Virgin Birth of

Christ, for, from the nature of the case, such evidence must be scanty and (to the critical historian) depends ultimately on one witness only. But, again, speaking for myself, I do not feel that criticism has in any way diminished its weight, while the congruity of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth with the doctrine of the Incarnation seems to have become more apparent, the more closely it is pondered. I do not attempt now to enlarge upon this, which I have tried to justify at length elsewhere ;* but so much I ought to say at this point, in this place.

About such fundamental articles of the Creed, there are, however, some general observations which may not unfitly be made at the close of this lecture. I have tried to maintain the inherent authority of the Church to revise, if at any time she believes it right to do so, after full deliberation, the confessions of faith which are demanded of her members. Every society of men is entitled, as knowledge widens and experience is enlarged, to reconsider the conditions of membership. And the Church, which has the promise of the Divine Spirit's

* In *Studia Sacra* I have devoted a chapter to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

guidance into truth, is in a special manner under obligation to follow that guidance, even though the path to which she is pointed be untrodden and hazardous. But, as I said at the beginning, when we are trying to formulate a revelation which is more than a mere natural discovery, we have to watch with the utmost jealousy all attempts at restatement, lest they should be inconsistent with the original data from which our Christian tradition starts. We may make mistakes in our judgments about this. The Church has no gift of inerrancy in theological statement. But it is far better to go too slow than too fast. And in some recent attempts at reconstruction of belief, perhaps a certain hastiness may be observed.

For instance, it is a wise, as well as a charitable, tolerance which does not judge harshly a departure from orthodox tradition on this or that single point of faith. If criticism is to be free—and if it is not free we shall never persuade educated laymen that it is candid—there must of necessity be cases in which a Christian scholar reaches personal conclusions on some subtle matter of doctrine that do not commend themselves to the equally free judg-

ment of his equally learned brethren. No great harm is done to the Church at large, although, if our critic is wrong, he loses something of the power of the Catholic Faith in his own life. But he is clinging all the time to the Faith as he understands it, and he is doing his best to interpret it for the benefit of others. We shall be very slow, if we be wise, to refuse such a man as large a measure of freedom of interpretation as is consistent with a definite conviction that in Christ we have God uniquely, and not only particularly, made manifest. There is, however, a consideration that he ought to weigh, if he finds that his speculations are, not on one article only but on many articles of the Creed, inconsistent with the considered judgment of the Church. It may be put thus : That is a poor logic which argues " This—or this—or this article may severally be dropped out of the Creed, without emasculating it, and therefore they may all go together without disaster." That method of argument used to be described in the old text books of logic as a " fallacy of composition." I think it may be traced in the writings of some liberal theologians who think that they can thus discard at

will, and one by one, the articles of the Apostles' Creed, while retaining the consolations and the hopes of the Christian revelation of God and man. "All or nothing" is the maxim of the heresy hunter. But "nothing at all" is the maxim of an agnostic, not a Christian.

And, again, if the great historical statements in the Creed were judged to be void of truth, it is plain at any rate that the uniqueness of the Christian religion would disappear. Certainly, something might remain which would be very precious. Perhaps it might be possible for future ages to retain the quality of the ethical teaching which historical Christianity has inspired. Its power of adaptation to new conditions has always been extraordinary and blessed. The high spiritual note which resounds again and again in the New Testament is never likely to be silenced. But a curious and interesting feature of "Modernist" criticism among our English clergy is that with it is combined an attempt to preserve much more than this. And, admirably Christian as is the spirit which prompts this attempt, it is doubtful if it can succeed. If we try to reduce the life of Christ to the dimensions of our common

humanity, if His Personality was really no more than that of a Divinely gifted prophet and seer, higher far than that of any other man but still the personality of a man like ourselves, without any such supernatural powers of miracle as the Church has always believed Him to have exercised ; if He did not really rise from the dead, if His Body was subject to corruption after death as our bodies are, if His Death was just the inevitable martyrdom of a reforming prophet, the splendid consummation of a life of self-sacrifice and devotion, then we retain His teaching Who spake as never man spake, we retain the inspiration of His example, in life and in death. But this is not all that Christendom has found, that Christendom finds, in Him.

If His Death were only the most illustrious example of self-sacrificing love, it could not bring with it any promise of the Forgiveness of sins. For the Appeal of the Cross is not the appeal only of a Hero and a Martyr ; it is the Appeal of a Saviour. Certainly, it is the case that the doctrine of the Atonement has been reduced to these poor dimensions by some, who do not find in it any objective act of God, but only the marvellous love of man. We need not

deny that the Appeal of the Cross, however expressed, will be an appeal of power. But it is right that we should understand that it will not be the same appeal as that which has been the strength of the sinful and the comfort of the sad, from age to age, if we discard the dogma—for dogma it is, dogma at its highest, at its hardest—that Jesus was God. A priest cannot exercise effectively the Ministry of Reconciliation and Penitence, in any form, if he has received his commission from any Master who was less than this. As the popular phrase goes, we cannot have it both ways. Either this attenuated conception of Christ, which is all that “Modernist” criticism will leave us, is inadequate; or else His ministers are no true priests. The role of prophets must content them.

The Christian minister will no longer fulfil the office of a priest. For priesthood means sacrifice; a priest pleads a sacrifice before God. And on this view, the Sacrifice of the Cross was the death of a martyr, but no more. It cannot effect the mind of God in relation to the sinner, except in so far as it may inspire the sinner with a desire to repent. Let us make no mistake about this. The objective efficacy of the Atone-

ment of the Cross flows from the Divinity of the Crucified, and must be abandoned as part of our Christian inheritance if Jesus were only man.

And, if this be true of the doctrine of the Cross, it affects also the whole teaching of the Church as to the Sacrament of the Cross. I am not now speaking of any special or disputed interpretation of the holy significance of that Sacrament. But what I am concerned to point out is that if the Person of Christ be reduced to our human standards, as some have attempted to reduce it, then the Sacrament of the Lord's Death remains as no more than a pathetic and moving ritual of remembrance, a stimulus to our spiritual emotions or a bond of common affection and piety among those who kneel at the same altars, but without any objective content whatever. We have been accustomed to believe that at least, when we approach the Lord's Table, we receive more than we bring, that the Eucharist is more than a sign of our faith and hope. Yet the words "This is My Body" cannot convey any greater thing than a memory of words spoken long ago at a great moment, if the dogma of Christ's Body, risen,

ascended, glorified, has been dissolved in the fires of criticism.

I daresay that some of my audience are thinking that such arguments are very like the dilemmas which have been found so untrustworthy in the past. They are like them, in form, it must be owned. And I will admit, too, that ecclesiastics, and bishops in particular, have often been too ready to predict ill consequences from beliefs or unbeliefs which they do not share. But none the less, a criticism which is candid must be prepared to face all the facts, including the logical issues of the negations for which the critic makes himself responsible, including, too, the issues which others suggest as likely to follow. It seems to me that some of our younger theologians have been so eager in the task—the necessary task, as they deem it—of a reconstruction of belief, that they have not fully weighed all that is involved in a rejection of those Articles of the Creed which speak of the Virgin Birth of Christ and of His Resurrection after His Burial. A sober criticism will, at any rate, examine and track out the consequences of all novel conclusions as to historical statements so full of moment as

those which we have been considering, before setting them aside as unworthy of further attention.

We have had before us, indeed, a very old problem : how to preserve the kernel of faith, while being ready to discard the husk if need be. Certainly, the kernel is the important thing—the revelation which is the core of these fruits of Christian intelligence. But we may injure and kill the life of the kernel if we deal carelessly or roughly with the husk which is its natural protection. And then what remains of the husk will not be of much use to us.

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